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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HANOI 001362

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: NA

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCL](#) [VM](#) [DPOL](#)

SUBJECT: Cadre Rotation - Grooming the next generation of leaders

1. (U) Summary: Vietnam is attempting to breathe new life into "cadre rotation" in order to train the next generation of leaders as well as to improve the quality of government service and to fight systemic local corruption. Cadre rotation was common during wartime and in the years immediately after unification, but had declined in more recent decades. Following renewed attention by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), new rotations take place at two levels: between national ministerial-level positions and provincial leadership jobs, and between provincial department-level positions and district leadership jobs. The CPV's personnel apparatus controls the entire process. Almost all rotated individuals are CPV members because "a high sense of political awareness" is required for leadership positions in Vietnam. Provincial-level implementation varies throughout the country and individual participation is sometimes unenthusiastic. Rotation is in the final analysis a tool by central authorities to enhance control and diminish the strength of local, potentially competing sources of power. End Summary.

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Party Resolution Eleven  
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2. (U) CPV Politburo Resolution Eleven of January 25, 2002, renewed emphasis on cadre rotation for party, government, Vietnam Fatherland Front, and State-owned enterprise officials. Although the practice had never completely died out, according to several CPV and GVN officials it had become less and less systematic after the mid- to late-1970's. Party leaders have pointed out that, after the next CPV Congress in 2006, all or almost all senior officials will have had no pre-1975 experience. CPV personnel officials reportedly designed the new rotation system to build the experience of capable younger officials to ready them for more senior positions. As such, the focus of rotation is not on filling jobs, but on developing leadership expertise and ensuring that the next generation of leaders has a broad range of experience, including at grassroots levels.

3. (U) Reviving rotation has been a rather slow, deliberate process. When poloffs first asked central and provincial authorities about implementing cadre rotation in mid-2002, the answer was that they had done little and could not say much about it yet, apart from a few test cases. Officials were hazy about practical details, such as available housing for incoming officials (especially officials sent to Hanoi) and arrangements for family members (do they stay behind? do they come along? what about jobs for spouses and schooling for children?) However, in March and April 2003, the CPV Central Organization and Personnel Commission, headed by fourteenth-ranked Politburo member, Tran Dinh Hoan (also a member of the CPV Secretariat and head of the main Party school, the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy),A organized meetings -- one in Phu Tho province for northern officials and one in Ho Chi Minh City for southern officials -- for provincial-level officials to discuss implementation of the program. According to an article by Hoan in the April 15 edition of the CPV mouthpiece, Nhan Dan, since the beginning of 2002, only 28 cadres rotated between national/province posts along with over 1,200 between provincial/district posts. In addition, over 200 cadres rotated between different national-level positions.

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Rotation of Provincial Cadres -- Phu Tho  
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4. (U) Poloffs recently met with Phu Tho provincial officials to discuss cadre rotation. Tran Dinh Hoan had singled out several provinces for their work on cadre rotation, naming Phu Tho first. This province is about 40 km northwest of Hanoi astride the Red River, comprising the upper reaches of the Red River Delta and a large proportion of hilly land. The population is about 1,300,000, 90% ethnic majority Kinh. The poverty rate is about 12%.

5. (U) According to Bui Hung, head of the provincial CPV Personnel Committee, an individual's "talent" more than any other factor determines participation in the program. The

CPV exercises the "leading role" over all personnel matters, including governmental rotations, he admitted. The program is part of the overall provincial personnel development plan, Hung added. Its particular purpose is to improve the quality of leaders and managers who have already received considerable training; the rotation is also integrated with other educational and training opportunities. Further selection criteria include political, "conduct," and health considerations. Hung noted that the province had to pay special attention to providing "good conditions" for officials rotated to remote areas. These include free housing and financial support. Phu Tho had applied the new rotation policy to management officials first, especially to those familiar with economics, and moved them into positions where they could apply their training and experience. He added that Phu Tho had already rotated about 100 officials under the program. Also, one Phu Tho official (whom he declined to name) had already rotated to a national-level CPV post.

16. (U) Hung claimed that the system of selecting cadre for the current program was different than in past cadre rotation cycles (although he declined to specify how). The province's rotation plan is being carried out in several phases and is based on available staff, he noted. A primary consideration is an evaluation of who is most suitable for a new post. Participating officials all have considerable work experience and have risen to at least the level of vice chairman of a district, or deputy director of a provincial-level department. Generally, they will remain responsible for areas in which they already have expertise, serving instead in a different location. Officials can be rotated not just from government post to government post, but also to or from Party or mass organization positions. Except for some individuals responsible for specific economic matters, for instance at state-owned enterprises, all rotated persons are CPV members, he admitted. Hung explained that, from the district level up, political considerations are "very important," hence the need for CPV membership as a prerequisite.

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Bac Ninh: Focus on Junior Officials  
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18. (U) Bac Ninh is the smallest province in Vietnam, but is densely populated with a population of almost one million. Located just north of Hanoi, it has a long history of providing state officials. According to one Bac Ninh leader, two thirds of Vietnam's Confucian doctorate-level scholars came from Bac Ninh in the imperial days. He also noted the province's long history as a center of Buddhism in Vietnam. However, it has only existed as a separate province since 1997.

19. (U) Bac Ninh officials admitted that there had as yet been very little cadre rotation in the province in the wake of Resolution Eleven. Officials framed cadre rotation as part of overall personnel training and development activities. Bac Ninh has been concentrating its personnel development efforts on commune-level officials (who are still too junior to be rotated under the current program) since "they actually implement policies." It was important to make sure that they had a good foundation of knowledge so that they could implement "grassroots democracy," another major CPV theme over the past several years. Training provided by the provincial CPV academy was key to this. The school's curriculum follows a national model, but officials emphasized that they took pains to make courses more focused and interesting by illustrating issues with local subjects. Over time, the academy's courses lead to a bachelor's degree in "Theory and Philosophy." Officials claimed that 90% (or 391) of provincial and district officials had received such a degree already and that the remaining 10% were currently working on it.

110. Director Tien of the CPV Personnel Committee for Bac Ninh echoed the goals of cadre rotation: to build experience and to provide a better grasp of issues. Rotation creates an opportunity for senior personnel to excel in a new environment. Those rotated are to be capable of significant additional advancement, so the program is primarily for officials under 45; those over the age of 50 are not considered at all, he claimed. However, he also emphasized rotation's importance in fighting "regionalism, localism, and branchism." Preventing officials from becoming too entrenched and connected to particular interests is a major goal, like the supposed practice of rotating customs officials every six months.

111. (U) In order to participate in cadre rotation, officials must have a professional and a theoretical (political) bachelor's degree, Bac Ninh officials explained. The province is currently reviewing existing personnel plans and determining what must be done to implement Resolution Eleven more fully. They explained their slow implementation

by claiming that Resolution Eleven's guidelines require pilot projects first and that the Phu Tho conference had been to review the lessons learned. Now Bac Ninh was also ready to move forward, provincial officials claimed.

12. (U) Provincial officials added that some of the greatest difficulties lie in administering the details, such as how to deal with benefits and pensions, particularly when one moves from one sector to another (e.g. from government to mass organization to Party). Tien noted that cadre rotation should actually be relatively easy to implement within Bac Ninh due to its small size. One could feasibly rotate between district and provincial levels without changing residences -- something often not possible in larger provinces such as Phu Tho.

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National Level Perspective  
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13. (U) Director General of the Personnel Management Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) Tran Anh Tuan, responsible for the management of all civil servants throughout Vietnam, also reviewed cadre rotation with poloffs. He spoke primarily about the national/provincial-level, but some of his remarks apply to the provincial/district-level as well. "High-level" personnel make decisions about rotation, he admitted. Variations in living standards complicate implementation of these decisions, however. Officials are often reluctant to move to remote and mountainous areas with limited educational and cultural opportunities. It is also difficult to find vacant positions in "very popular places" such as Ho Chi Minh City. Identifying personnel in remote provinces sufficiently qualified for rotation is another challenge, he added. Even so, part of the reason for the program is to help narrow gaps between different parts of the country by bringing qualified people to serve in and be exposed to the problems of difficult and remote areas, he explained.

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National/Local Tension  
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14. (U) Director General Tuan said that before the CPV had reemphasized cadre rotation with Resolution Eleven, provincial personnel decisions were left to individual provinces. He alleged that this often resulted in entire provinces being "limited" by the sometimes-low capability of the provincial chairman. The usually close professional and personal relationships between successive chairmen also limited creativity, he said, a cycle that perpetuated endemic weaknesses. This also led to sentiments against outsiders coming into a province -- another manifestation of what Bac Ninh's Tien called "localism."

15. (U) DG Tuan explained that the rotation system was intended, in part, to break up this cycle and thus narrow gaps between provinces. He noted that while preparing Resolution Eleven, Vietnam had studied personnel rotation systems in non-Communist countries for the first time, especially those in Japan and Singapore. Vietnam did not have the economic capability to follow those examples, with rotations every two years, but was trying to use other elements of their systems, he added.

16. (U) The rotation program has only been genuinely underway for six months at the national level, so only a few rotations have taken place and there has been no review yet, according to DG Tuan. Some provinces have not shown much "adaptive capacity," he commented, so implementation has been spotty. Rotated officials need to be supported, for instance in the provision of housing in the new location. While this is less difficult at the national level, it is a serious financial burden for many provinces, he pointed out. Moreover, it is difficult for officials rotated to distant provinces to stay far away from their families. They tend to return home every weekend, making it difficult for officials to get to know their assigned provinces as well as they should. Furthermore, DG Tuan noted, this limits their participation in the important informal relationship-building and after-hours discussions of issues that characterize GVN and CPV governance. It was relatively easy to rotate cadre during wartime, but officials are not so willing during peace, he lamented.

17. (U) Comment: Cadre rotation serves functions including grooming a new generation of leaders, improving leadership in backwater provinces, and perhaps hindering corruption by breaking up local "mafias." In order to be effective in their new positions, rotated officials must be sufficiently dynamic and collegial to overcome their outsider status, however. Presumably, this is not an ineffective way to determine whether promising leaders are fit for higher positions. It is also a way for the CPV, particularly its higher levels, to assert its control over

the outlook and composition of leadership, not only at the national-level, but in the provinces too. The tension between local and central authority in Vietnam has a long history; rotation -- whether of Confucian mandarins or of Communist cadres -- has been and is likely to remain an important tool used by central authorities to break up real and potentially competing local power structures.

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